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## Research Article

# Community-Led Development: Perspectives and Approaches of Four Member Organizations

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The imperative to promote peaceful, accountable and inclusive societies and institutions has increasingly resulted in the adoption of community-led approaches. Community-led Development (CLD) is widely believed as a crucial approach for communities to alleviate poverty and achieve sustainable development. This paper explores the perspectives and approaches of CLD among four member organizations of the movement. The research questions addressed were: What are the perspectives and approaches towards CLD amongst four-member organizations? How do the methodologies of these four-member organizations compare to the CLD analytic framework? The data from the organizations was analyzed through the lens of the CLD framework, which categorizes phases of CLD into mindset, capacity, impact and sustainability. The analysis provides a relatively comprehensive understanding of how community-led approaches are implemented at the field-level of international NGOs. The findings highlighted differences in perspectives and approaches of the organizations compared to the analytic framework. One organization demonstrates a relatively comprehensive methodology with respect to the four phases of CLD while the remaining three focus mainly on mindset and capacity aspects. Additional research outcomes include a modified framework and principles and identification of enablers and barriers of CLD. These insights are valuable for organizations and their staff to utilize in advocating for and carrying out CLD approaches.

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## Abbreviations and Acronym Lists

- CCI – Comprehensive Community Initiatives
- CBO – Community-based Organizations
- CDD – Community-driven Development
- CLD – Community-led Development
- CSOs – Civil Society Organizations
- NGOs – Non-governmental Organization
- EC – Enterprise Communities
- EZ – Empowerment Zones
- IPIC – Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone
- NIH – National Institute of Health
- PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
- SD – Sustainable Development
- SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
- SNA – Strengths and Needs Assessment
- SWOT – Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
- THP – The Hunger Project
- UN – United Nations

- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture
- VCAW – Vision Commitment and Action Workshop
- WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Introduction

The economic and social progress of developing countries has been a contentious issue among academicians, practitioners, anthropologists and development economists since the 1940s (Bado, 2012). Supported state interventions, external exploitation by colonial powers, development assistance programs as well as neoclassical approaches (less state intervention) were pushed by western institutions to reduce poverty and ensure socio-economic progress, particularly in the Global South (Preston, 1996; Contreras, 2010). The ‘top-down’ approach of the past several decades has mostly overlooked the indigenous knowledge and contribution of the local communities.

Governments and international institutions allocated significant resources to alleviate poverty in developing countries, but it has had insignificant results (Bado, 2012). The inefficiencies of these programs may be because they are donor-driven, leaving a discrepancy between what they assumed as the needs of the poor and the actual need on the ground.

William Easterly (2006) affirms that while a significant amount of foreign aid has been spent on projects in developing countries, the results have been insignificant. He criticized the ‘top-down’ approach that forces the adoption of presumably better solutions to the local communities. The solutions provided are often not based on the actual problems on the ground nor built on the strengths. Impact and sustainability can only be ensured if those who live in that place and understand the fragile complexities of the community problems set visions and integrate them into the existing structure (Easterly, 2006).

The Hunger Project (THP) and 60 like-minded organizations came together and initiated a movement on an alternative development approach that is committed to influencing paradigm shifts called ‘the movement for Community-led Development’ (Movement for Community-led Development, n.d.). The advocacy movement was inspired by SDG #16 and calls for building participatory, effective, accountable institutions “at all levels” (UN, 2015) – which must start at the level closest to the people. The goal promotes providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

This study was an Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone (IPIC) project that provided answers to the following research questions: what are the perspectives and approaches towards CLD amongst four-member organizations? How do the methodologies of these four-member organizations of the movement compare to the analytic framework of CLD?

The primary inquiry is to understand what CLD encompasses and what factors influence or hinder its effectiveness, optimal CLD principles, and practices at the field level of international NGOs. Insights were garnered from qualitative interviews with NGO experts as well as a review of methodologies, secondary documents, a video analysis, and literature review. Findings were analyzed according to the four phases of the CLD analytic framework.

## Literature Review

CLD encompasses community-level initiatives implemented by various actors including communities, NGOs and governments. The review included inputs from each for an accurate understanding of the CLD concept. Much of the research originates from NGOs and the public sector as an alternative development approach, thus giving insight for empowering marginalized local voices and providing support for them to lead their own development. The reviewed literature was mainly conducted in developed countries where CLD has gained prominence as a viable means to alleviate poverty. Comprehensive Community Initiatives, Inspiring Communities and Vibrant Communities in the United States, New Zealand and Canada respectively, are among the well-documented CLD initiatives studied.

### Definitions

Scholars, researchers, and practitioners have various definitions of CLD. However, they all agree that the approach puts the local community in the driving seat as agents of their own development, with background support from civil society organizations (CSOs), governments or community development specialists (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013a; Reid & Flora, 2002)

Before defining CLD, the concept of a community must first be clarified. 'Community' may be understood as both geographical locations and people who have common values and beliefs (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). NIH researchers

conceptualized community in four ways: as a setting, target, resource, or agent (McLeroy, Norton, Kegler, Burdine, & Sumaya, 2003). On the other hand, Reid and Flora (2002), believed that "community is much more than a designated territory...is, rather, the people who make it up, the structure of their relationships among themselves and with external partners, their skills, attitudes, beliefs and contributions" (p.3). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research, the notion of community is conceptualized as a *setting*, primarily defined geographically, and is the location in which interventions are implemented (McLeroy et al., 2003). In this paper, analyzed initiatives were carried out in specific locations: sub-districts or panchayats (India), cities or towns, suburbs or provinces. The geographical place is considered vital to mobilize people with common interests and values; to build on what people already have and to leverage 'outside' resources (Bijoux, 2015; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013b).

Inspiring Communities defined CLD as "the process of working together in place to create and achieve locally determined visions and goals" (2018, p.1). Bijoux (2015) also noted that CLD encourages the mobilization of community action and effort with 'place' as a core focus (Figure 1). CLD establishes a model for what is important to a specific community and builds capacity by recognizing that only working together can capitalize on the possibilities and address the constraints. It also helps channel external investment and support towards relevant local priorities and plans (Inspiring Communities, 2013b).



Figure 1. Place is at the center of Community-led Development

Bijoux (2015, p. 760)

Inspiring Communities further elaborated the concept as not an end to itself but a process with a particular set of principles and practices. Bijoux explained that the CLD framework is not intended for service-delivery, rather it leverages existing capacities for local communities to identify, design and lead projects (Torjman and Makhoul, 2012). The process also encompasses working together across sectors, capacitating the community-level leadership, is intentional, adaptable and working to create lasting changes (Bijoux, 2015).

Bijoux (2015) argued that CLD is not linear and has complex pathways depending on the strengths a community already possesses; which is then maximized with external support. There are, however, some sets of principles and approaches common to successful CLD (Inspiring Communities, 2013; Reid & Flora, 2002; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Mercy Corps, 2010).

An amalgamated definition of CLD from this review is as follows: a collaborative process of creating unique, locally-owned visions and building upon community strengths to tackle local problems. Furthermore, CLD focuses on 'place-based' grassroots involvement, putting communities at the center to lead their own development.

### Principles

The following key principles have been identified in the literature that underlie CLD approaches:

Community self-determination: the ability to have a voice, to participate & exercise control over one's destiny; a focus on strengths and assets of communities & the importance of their knowledge base; holistic and ecological approach, recognizing interconnectedness & complexity factors and outcomes at various levels; a focus on process and relationships as well as tangible outcomes (Ball & Thornley, 2015, p.2).

Inspiring communities (2018) also elaborated five core practice principles that build CLD as "shared local visions; utilizing existing strengths and assets; many stakeholders working together; building diverse and collaborative leadership and working adaptively, learning" (p.1).

According to the literature, several core sets of concepts and practices influenced CLD: Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (Reid & Flora, 2002), community-driven development, or CDD (World Bank, 2017), strengths and assets-based approach, local leadership and governance, and comprehensive community initiatives (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

### Investing in Community Capacity

Reid and Flora (2012) examined the USDA-initiated program that designated 58 rural communities with high poverty rates as "Empowerment Zones (EZ) or Enterprise Communities (EC)". The EZ/EC are initiatives to tackle unemployment and ensure economic stability through the allocation of federal funds and award of grants to suffering communities (GAO, 2006). EZ/EC process highlights "the role of

local communities in identifying solutions and the use of public-private partnerships to attract the investment necessary for sustainable economic and community development" (GAO, 2006, p.1).

Reid and Flora discussed the importance of empowering communities and capacity-building as an integral part of sustainable CLD, especially in communities suffering from poverty. CLD has little to do with money, rather "it is a matter of hope and of participatory processes toward collective goals and toward increased community leadership capacity over time" (Reid & Flora, 2002, p.1). Other scholars stressed that focusing on money to ensure development, without ensuring capacity-building, guidance and advice, is insufficient to deliver the expected outcomes (Aigner, Raymond & Tirmizi, 2001).

The main characteristics and components of the EZ/EC, as discussed by Reid and Flora (2002), that separate EZ/EC are:

It's a long-term (over a decade) and requires active citizen involvement throughout the life of the development process; low-income & minority citizens encouraged for community leadership opportunities; active use of partnerships among internal & external organizations that support goals set by local citizens based on their unique visions; strategic & goal driven which is intentionally planned but not random nor driven by the availability of dollars; it requires established performance benchmarks to monitor progress by achieving them; the communities need to engage in flexible and collaborative partnership with the federal government (p.2).

Mercy Corps (2010), also reached in similar conclusion about the importance of CLD to enhance the local capacity. The organization presented three key benefits of community-led programming in fragile environments from Iraq and Afghanistan: 1) CLD results in capacity-building by engaging with local officials and population in close working relations to run initiatives while ensuring responsibility and openness. 2) CLD helps achieve community-building with the involvement of all concerned parties to determine and tackle the local problems, promoting inclusion and collaboration, and ensuring proper use of resources. 3) The approach helps to ensure ownership-building by enhancing individuals' ability and readiness to play a role and contribute to initiatives to create better local settings.

### Community-driven Development

*Voices of the Poor* study (Narayan & Patel, 2000), based on interviews of 60,000 impoverished individuals in 60 countries found that poor people request a solution led and driven by the communities. When the individuals were questioned to specify something that can have a significant effect on their lives, they answered: (a) their own associations or institutions so that they can have a voice and be at an equal level with others; (b) targeted help through locally-led initiatives; and (c) management of resources locally, so they can fight bad practices (corruption). The poor want to see accountability in both the social and public sectors to them (Gillespie, 2004).

Based on this evidence and lessons from its many years of working with developing countries, the World Bank initiated CDD and currently supports approximately 400 projects in 94 countries with a budget of \$30 billion (Wong, 2012). CDD programs operate on the principles of “transparency, participation, demand-responsiveness, greater downward accountability, and enhanced local capacity” (World Bank, 2017). The World Bank believes that CDD practices and measures are crucial to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development future.

While various organizations use different names, CDD and CLD have significant overlaps, commonalities and similar principles. However, the former approach is mainly project-focused whereas CLD focuses on improving systems by changing mindsets, building capacity, and ensuring self-reliance to achieve sustainable development (Movement for Community-led Development, n.d.).

### Assets-based Approach

The main theory behind Amartya Sen’s (1999), award-winning book, *Development as Freedom*, is that healthy human development is a combined result of the capacity that individuals have and their tangible strengths. “Human development must be concerned with both poverty and capability – the capacity to cope, adapt, grow and thrive through often mobilizing unrecognized skills and opportunities.” (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012, p.3).

Inherent strengths and capacities play an important role in CLD. All communities are equipped with rich resources and qualities. Regardless of their socio-economic status, every society has knowledge and resources that can be seen as a starting point to build upon. There is no single starting point for CLD, however, communities can build on their level of existing resources, strengths and skills. The principles of CLD apply to communities of all types and sizes and to both urban and rural areas (Torjman, 2012).

Western nations implemented policies that decentralized public resources and decision-making power to the local people with less government involvement in their issues. The practice encourages people to be catalysts of their development and local transformation without relying much on external factors (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

An extensive list of literature discussed the importance of determining strengths, assets, and resources to build upon solutions that are prioritized, implemented and led by the communities (Inspiring Communities, 2013a; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Bijoux, 2015). The traditional development approaches by governments and other donors focused on setting goals and identifying a structure to meet these goals. The concept of community-led development, however, is driven by communities. In this approach, citizens play a prominent role and determine the nature of problems and community strengths, decide where to start and what to implement to solve the issues prioritized (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). Unlike linear government approaches, the CLD practice is often sophisticated and requires a thoughtful process to ensure the equal involvement of everyone in the community and promote inclusion and diversity. Diverse backgrounds, relationships, and areas of expertise are valued throughout the process (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

Assets-based communities are often viewed from the position of their unique skills and capacities. Collaborative relationships recognize the strengths, views, and knowledge of those who are involved in the process. Conversely, traditional approaches focus only on determining vulnerabilities and gaps; often assessing from the viewpoints of what is lacking and specific problems in the place. Nevertheless, CLD views communities in their collective strengths and abilities that can be leveraged to alleviate local issues.

Behavior change, a shift in expectations and mindset is required for local communities and organizations to adapt to their new roles and work in CLD ways where “bottom-up visions and priorities meet those from the top-down” (Bijoux, 2015, p.769).

### Focus on Governance and Local Leadership

Torjman and Makhoul (2012) noted that governance encompasses an active citizenry and responsible government. Depending on the context, local and religious leaders are also part of the local governance. It is widely believed that the state needs to work closely in partnership with citizens, private sectors and other concerned bodies to set regulations and policies and accomplish broad sets of objectives in every aspect, from ensuring citizens’ access to health services and education, as well as tackling environmental factors and creating productive citizens to involve in employment opportunities. It is also noted that civic engagement is crucial and should be encouraged at every scale (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

An extensive list of literature supports the importance of local governance and leadership for CLD. It’s essential to identify competent and skilled leaders to engage in close working relations and establish a collaborative partnership as well as decision-making processes (Reid & Flora, 2002; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Ball & Thornley, 2015). Reid and Flora noted the importance of the local leaders in grasping the principles of the approach. Servant leadership is crucial to succeeding as a style that highlights the importance of service to empower followers and citizens by supporting and developing their skills (Reid & Flora, 2002).

The literature also emphasized the need for a mindset shift to dismantle the old structure and establish new ones that are appropriate for the time. The current structure has typically failed to address the complicated reality of the problems that affect the communities (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013; Herbert-Cheshire & Higgins, 2004). Encouraging leadership at all levels by identifying, recruiting, and training the citizens is considered necessary to enhance collective local leadership.

The role of the central government was extensively discussed in the literature. Torjman and Makhoul (2012), noted the three major roles of government as an exemplar, investor, and enabler. As an exemplar, “international commitments and national legislations establish regulatory and policy frameworks” (p.22), as well as lead by example in creating an inclusive labor force and ethical employment standards. As an investor, the government also strategically invests in education and capacity-building of citizens and builds infrastructure, and supports local economic opportunities in their communities through social procurement. As an enabler, the central government promotes local governance to strengthen and ensure sustainability.

Ball and Thornley (2015) explicitly discussed the role of the central government as:

Remove bureaucratic barriers; collaboration between central government and communities; enhance capacity at both community and government levels by establishing internal systems, roles and processes through training, mentoring and technical support; invest strategically- create an environment that supports longer-term, comprehensive and collaborative approaches that are evidence-informed; and create a supportive policy context that supports local objectives, encourages community-level innovation and entrepreneurialism as well as social procurement can support communities (p.46).

### Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Torjman and Makhoul (2012) noted that the complexities of local issues influence the practice of CLD. It is widely believed that the socio-economic challenges facing the communities are intertwined and have increasingly become multifaceted. Complex problems are caused by factors such as conflicts, human-made and natural disasters, population movements, social exclusion, globalization and technological advancements, poverty, climate change, migration and economic inequality (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

Traditionally, single-government and donor programs tried to tackle complex problems and provide sustainable solutions. However, the repeated attempts have been ineffective and failed. The failure can be attributed to the programs’ linear nature and not considering all the causes of the complex factors on the ground. Furthermore, these initiatives did not value the contributions of the citizens and other stakeholders, including the private and social sectors.

The complexity of the problems and gaps of traditional approaches have given an opportunity to a rise of ‘comprehensive community initiatives’ (CCIs), that focus on holistic and integrated solutions to tackle local problems. CCIs are approaches for the revival of suffering local communities and are made of multiple programs based on the assumption that integrated programming will stimulate significant improvements in the communities (Kubisch, Connell & Fulbright-Anderson, 2001). The initiatives are comprehensive in scale aiming to address multiple issues. Some of the principles of the initiatives are asset-based, adaptive, and involve citizens and communities in a collaborative relationship (Kubisch et al., 2001; Gardner, 2011).

CCIs aim to promote systemic and sustainable transformation, build new networks and improve opportunities for distressed communities affected by complex issues (Leviton-Reid & Torjman, 2006, Kubisch et al., 2001).

### Success Factors

Key ingredients associated with successful community-led approaches are extensively discussed in the literature. Inspiring Communities (2012), included “having people with the right skills and mindset; quality relationships based on trust; starting in and with communities; having highly skilled leaders working together; readiness for a long-term journey and ability to adapt to the new way of working” (p.1).

Ball and Thornley (2015), explicitly elaborated on the characteristics and processes for the success of community-led initiatives as follows:

A shared vision, owned by the community (Inspiring communities, 2012; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012); community readiness; intentionality and a focus on outcomes; long-term and adaptable funding arrangements; a focus on community capacity-building; processes for addressing power imbalances; focus on relationships; skilled leadership and facilitation, appropriate scale; continuous learning and adaptation (p.2)

## Barriers to Success

Literature suggested that despite the overall impressive progress of community-led initiatives in achieving their intended outcomes, communities differ in the extent to which they understand the CLD concept (Reid & Flora, 2002). Among communities that do not understand the principles and concepts, two factors appear frequently. One, the perception of local leaders towards the program as a 'grant' rather than as a long-term community-building process. Secondly, ego-driven leadership is based on control of resources, rather than fostering a transparent and conducive environment for civic participation through servant leadership (Reid & Flora, 2002).

Ball and Thornley (2015) divided barriers that can hinder the effectiveness and success of community-led initiatives into two categories; project-level and system-level factors. Key barriers at the project level are lack of shared vision; poor engagement with communities; insufficient emphasis on systemic and policy-level change; skill gaps and limited capacity; short-term approach and defunding. The system-level factors include adverse funding and accountability measures or a culture of central government that is not well-aligned to working with communities (focusing on top-down solutions, being deficit-based rather than strengths-based, or single-issue focused).

The main strength of the literature is that definitions and principles were clearly discussed in detail and with a practical basis. The literature elaborated on details of other approaches that led to the emergence of the CLD concept. The role of governance, central government and local leadership, was emphasized to ensure sustainable implementation of the local initiatives. While success factors and barriers could be context-specific, the findings were crucial for those who want to adopt this approach for future programs.

Based on the literature review, every community and organization has various perspectives and approaches depending on several factors and contextual realities. The common themes found in the literature were that CLD is a place- and strengths-based, long-term, and involves a strategic investment with adaptable funding that practices collaborative relationships. Local governance was emphasized as crucial in ensuring the sustainability of initiatives.

## Limitations and Challenges

Evidence from developed countries to developing nations overwhelmingly favors the CLD approach and its principles as a viable approach to tackling local problems. However, the theory and practice of the approach are still emergent and not fully developed (Inspiring Communities, 2012). The approach varies from place to place depending on the available strengths to build on, community readiness and other social dynamics. The framework is also not a linear pathway across places and communities, as opposed to the traditional approaches.

The literature noted that CLD is not a magical solution to a complicated problem, nor is it an approach that stands alone (Bijoux, 2015). Significant results can happen when CLD is integrated with other core strategies and into practice within different sectors. For example, in some places, CLD might require all community members to come together to set shared visions and future action plans. In others, it can be used to bring local stakeholders together to progress an opportunity, conduct a SWOT analysis to identify root causes of the social issue and prepare the next step.

Evidence from the literature on what works to influence community-led change is largely based on case studies, qualitative research and the insights of evaluators and practitioners (Ball & Thornley, 2015). Comprehensive quantitative evidence on the process and success of community-led initiatives is rare and widely lacking.

All but two reviewed research focused on developed countries. It may be wise to present the literature findings as an accurate reflection of development approaches with less state intervention accompanied by significant allocation of public resources at the local level. Conversely, the reality in developing countries is different. Thus, more research and studies were suggested to understand the practice in developing countries.

## Method

This research utilized a qualitative approach which included a review of secondary information (methodologies) and practitioner interviews to add practical inputs to the reviewed research. The method supports the aim of this paper to provide a critical understanding of alternative development approaches. Four non-governmental organizations, namely CARE, The Hunger Project, Nuru International and Roots of Development were identified as per convenience and purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted with three practitioners, all of whom were experts who work with the selected NGOs in leadership and advocacy roles. For CARE, a video analysis and methodology review were performed. Demographic details were not collected from practitioners as the focus was on the organizations' approach and experiences. Practitioners' insights were collected on organizations' community-led approaches and related principles and processes, as well as their perspectives on the technical and practical areas of CLD. The data from interviews and literature was organized into emerging themes and analyzed utilizing the CLD framework; centered on practical experiences and outlooks produced rather than on specific country or cultural contexts.

For interviews, open-ended questions were formed mainly in interpretive and suitable styles – trying to understand people's knowledge, experiences and opinions, probing and clarifying their meaning. Practitioners were first asked about their respective community-led development methodologies and approaches. In many cases, questions were asked along with basic explanations, as the concept of CLD can be misunderstood with other participatory or community development approaches.

The decision to identify and include relevant information was based on providing governments, NGOs and advocates a comprehensive understanding of CLD and the aspects to consider as they implement bottom-up, place-based development programs. Therefore, while theory is important, the objective is to provide practical insights.

## Analytic Framework

The findings were categorized into four phases of the analytic framework (Movement for Community-led development, n.d.). The first phase was *mindset* that included specific themes such as gender analysis, empowering individuals to identify and stand for a shared vision, social mobilization and identifying strengths, capacities, and assets of communities. The second phase was *capacity*, with themes of building 'social infrastructure' in terms of leadership, governance, skills, group formation and linkages. The third phase was *impact* that encompasses participatory planning, social cohesion, social

accountability and data for the people. The fourth phase was *sustainability*, which included specific actions to ensure outcomes are sustainable and resilient to political, economic and other shocks.

Movement for Community-led Development (n.d.)



Figure 2. Phases of Community-led Development

## Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the methodology is that it cannot be easily generalized to the population and quantitative data was not included. Those who are referring to this paper should understand that this is a non-representative sample. Another limitation of this study, like many other programs or policy, may be that the methodology outlined in the paper can be different from the practice and implementation on the ground, thus field level inquiry and further evidence is required to enhance a comprehensive understanding of the respective organizations' approaches. Furthermore, the practitioners and organizations interviewed and analyzed were all Americans and western NGOs.

## Results

The video speech, four methodologies and three interviews were transcribed before being divided into themes. Themes were further dissected into the four phases of the analytic framework of CLD (mindset, capacity, impact and sustainability). This distinction was for the purpose of analysis and in reality, all four phases were evident in nearly every experience shared by the interviewed practitioners. Regardless, *mindset* and *capacity* aspects of the analytic framework were most frequently discussed, especially with respect to existing structures and culture. The CLD approach of three out of the four organizations studied consists of predominantly capacity phase programming within the analytic framework.

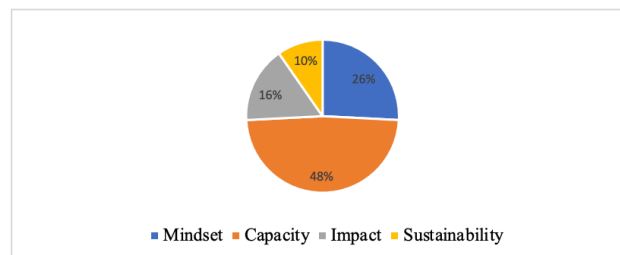


Figure 3. Interview Findings According to Phases of the CLD Analytic Framework

All practitioners described 'community' as a geographic place where people live and work, roughly between a 10-15 kilometer radius. One practitioner colloquially defined a community as "a big enough area so that people can manage effectively

their own development activities” (THP practitioner, June 29, 2018). The same practitioner further offered that it is approximately the distance a woman with a baby on her back can travel on foot, which is about 10 kilometers. However, the practitioner also elaborated on the challenges of defining community by its geographic location in places where there are no proper boundaries or infrastructure.

According to practitioners, the purpose of CLD is divided into ensuring sustainable development and enabling social transformation in communities. Within this division, major themes discussed include women’s empowerment (agency, skills), empowering local staff (skills, capacity building), economic development, poverty reduction, strengthening local leadership, self-reliance, enhancing social capital, and resilience. Practitioners also noted the importance of collaborative partnerships with citizens and other stakeholders as well as focus on local governance for communities to lead their own development.

## Mindset

Mindset is about viewing everyone as *change agents*, or rights-bearing, active citizens whose capacity can be harnessed to collaborate, set vision and lead their own development initiatives (Movement for Community-led Development, n.d.). The shift in mindset enables citizens and their governments to engage in collaborative working relations.

THP’s approach is influenced by its primary principle of human dignity (Coonrod, 2016), which requires that people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, so they are in a position to take action and improve their lives. THP starts the process by determining a community that is ready for the self-reliance journey and long-term engagement. Then, the organization mobilizes citizens and communities before recruiting animators to identify the initial project, which is a complex and intentional process (Coonrod, 2016).

The practitioners emphasized the importance of viewing communities as change agents rather than helpless ‘beneficiaries’ without any viable resources. The practitioner from Roots of Development said, “We assume that community has had plenty of local resources. The people themselves, if they have a brain, two arms, two legs, whatever their resources because they can do a lot” (Roots practitioner interview, July 5, 2018). The THP practitioner asserted that the main reason for the ineffectiveness of traditional development can be attributed to treating poor and hungry people as ‘victims’ and passive beneficiaries. Hence, the importance of viewing everyone as the key resources and change agents for their own development cannot be overstated.

The practitioners explicitly emphasized the challenge of approaching development differently since top-down approaches have become the dominant culture in the development arena. The THP practitioner described the challenge as follows:

Mindset shift? Now, that's really hard because most people who want to work in development are motivated by wanting to help people who are less fortunate than they. We really have to work intensively with people to have them recognize that the motivation within themselves, while it's a good motivation, it's a bad basis for good development. It is often a wrenching mindset shift for people to really discover what it means to work with people from a position of their own dignity. (THP Practitioner interview, June 29, 2018)

The practitioners described gender issues as a challenge everywhere and thus, it should be approached systematically with localized analysis and methods to address barriers to women’s full and equal participation in development. Context-specific findings have led THP to focus on economic empowerment in areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, political empowerment in India and empowering the social position of indigenous women in Latin America.

Nuru International, on the other hand, has been focusing on working with women household members as an entry point into the community and recently adopted minimum standards for promoting and mainstreaming gender equality. The organization’s practical steps include the adoption of a gender equality policy, having gender-disaggregated data and using gender-specific analysis. Nuru’s intention is to work primarily with women to ensure their participation in programming. CARE views women’s empowerment through the lens of poor

women’s struggles to achieve their full and equal human rights. In these struggles, women strive to balance practical, daily, individual achievements with strategic, collective, and long-term work to challenge biased social rules and institutions (Coonrod, 2015). The practitioners noted the difficulty to ensure the involvement of women in men-dominant culture.

To identify the strengths, assets and resources of communities, THP’s first step is finding a tradition that people already know about, building upon that tradition and transforming it to be modern and more inclusive. The second, as noted by the practitioner, utilizes participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, an approach that utilizes knowledge and perspectives of local communities in asset mapping, design and execution of community initiatives. Consequently, community readiness and willingness to commit to locally-led change are identified among the key elements to selecting an intervention site. Communities expecting handouts or lacking belief in their abilities do not meet the criteria for self-reliant CLD approaches. As an important step for building on strengths, THP puts effort in carefully assessing, identifying and helping communities to pick their first, simple, collective project that builds people’s confidence in their ability and increases trust in each other. Nuru utilizes an intentional and highly iterative program planning process that brings together multiple stakeholders, community groups and local government. The organization, through its local staff, also conducts strengths and needs assessments (SNA) to identify capacities as well as needs at the community level. Roots also intentionally conducts mapping exercises with community groups and leaders to identify assets and resources that exist in the community.

## Capacity

The practitioners stressed the importance of investing in community capacity, having a clear understanding of the role of the community and that of CSOs, as well as building transparent and strong relations through long-term programs ranging from five to ten years. THP implements programs for eight years on average whereas Nuru commits for five to seven years. Roots of Development has been in the same place for the past ten years. CARE also has a long-term development program focusing on the empowerment and agency of women.

CARE defines women’s empowerment as the aggregate progress needed for a woman to realize her full potential and human rights; the interplay of changes in an agency to her own aspirations and capabilities, the structure of the environment that surrounds and conditions her and relations, or the power relations through which she negotiates her path. Focusing on women’s empowerment, CARE utilizes a governance framework for each specific context. The organization assesses women’s issues on questions such as; what is the government doing to support her? Can she inherit resources? Can she get an equal wage in the market? Can she access land? A governance framework entails having informed and responsible citizens who can obtain power, as well as accountable and responsible power holders who will open up spaces for negotiation between the government and women (Coonrod, 2015).

The need for local leadership was also emphasized by practitioners. “The most important [practice] is to be able to generate and develop local leadership, initially the staff, and then, increasingly volunteer animators who facilitate and mobilize people,” (THP Practitioner interview, June 29, 2018). Furthermore, THP methodology emphasizes transformative leadership – which is not top-down, authority-based, but a leadership that awakens people to their own power (Coonrod, 2016). Local-level associations are encouraged to include equal numbers of women and men from every component of the community to ensure inclusive leadership.

The Nuru International practitioner described the need for everybody to be on board with the mentality of service, working for others rather than ‘thinking anyone is above the other.’ Nuru’s methodology, otherwise known as ‘The Leadership Program,’ has adopted the servant leadership philosophy which is based on the idea that a leader can accomplish more through a service-oriented mindset by inspiring the followers. To do this, a leader must ‘serve’ their followers to help them achieve their fullest potential. This emphasis on servant leadership is noted as a viable approach to CLD.

Nuru’s methodology has characteristics and behaviors consistent with the servant-leadership philosophy. The following traits and actions are highlighted in Nuru’s training activities:

1. Admit when you make a mistake	7. Apologize for mistakes
2. Seek to understand	8. Treat all people equally
3. Be together with your people	9. Don't waste resources
4. Do what is right	10. Represent your team well.
5. Speak when something is wrong	11. Make sacrifices for your people
6. Lead by example	12. Take the initiative to make improvements.

**Table 1.** Nuru International Servant Leadership Characteristics

The Leadership Program (Hong, 2015).

“Servant leadership is a contrarian approach to the traditional leadership paradigm, especially in the developing world where leaders tend to ‘lord’ their leadership over others to promote their own agendas” (Hong, 2015, p.7). Nuru International begins a program planning process with recruitment, with managers seeking to hire local staff who also value this type of leadership.

The most common finding across the organizations in the capacity phase was their focus on recruiting local staff and investing in their capacity. This process is regarded highly, and they fully rely on local staff to run country operations as well as program implementation at the community level.

Organizations systematically approach capacity-building activities in their target communities. THP recruits local staff, identifies male and female animators and provides vision, commitment and action workshops (VCAW). During these workshops, animators and local staff help communities identify the first project that builds people’s confidence in their abilities and strengths. Nuru International recruits and trains local staff in its mission, philosophy, and approach to poverty solutions. Experts and local staff come together for an intensive three to four-month series of facilitated workshops, discussions, exercises and field sessions to co-create and formulate programming. This process solely focuses on co-creation and local design to engage with communities. The training and workshop-based approach create a level playing field before setting a common agenda; all practitioners stressed this. Roots works closely with local leaders and associations; providing workshops and training on various topics.

Roots capacity-building approach revolves around two core components. First, build skills to learn and internalize characteristics that constitute an effective community-based organization (CBO). Some of the core skills are principles of community-driven development (CDD): leadership, diversity, democratic principles, conflict management and resolution. Second, the skills needed to design, implement and execute community initiatives effectively, such as project management, soliciting and building partnerships, strategic planning and entrepreneurship among others.

The interviewed practitioners emphasized the crucial role of governance in terms of ensuring the effectiveness of community-led initiatives. While clearly noting governance as context-dependent, they all acknowledged a collaborative partnership between citizens and local government as the pathway to social progress and sustainability of any development activity. Nuru International approaches development as per the place and context without having a linear ‘one size fits all’ solution. In places where local governance is strong, working with the existing government system, engaging closely with officials by recognizing their roles, building their capacity and working together in programming was described as the most logical step forward to succeed. Engagements with the government may be symbolic (approvals, authorization) while others are for reporting purposes.

According to THP, a key element of an empowering context for gender-focused, community-led development is to forge an effective working partnership between active citizens and their local government (Coonrod, 2016). Thus, the organization works to strengthen the role of the local government at every step in the process – providing orientation and capacity-building workshops while also arranging exchange visits to other communities. Communities mobilized by THP have developed key activities for building local governance; including citizen charters, participatory planning, and accountability forums.

When discussing the role of CSOs, the practitioners stressed that the role should be a long-term and intentional process that aligns with the knowledge and skills of the organizations. They further emphasized the need to determine the best role that CSOs can play and to have a clear distinction to stay within their respective limits.

**Impact**

Despite the funding and structural power it holds, CARE acknowledges the need to open up spaces for negotiation between themselves and the community. CARE believes that CSOs need to grow ears to hear their communities. Thus, community scorecards are used as a way for the community and service providers to agree on a set of deliverables to improve services. There is also a participatory performance

tracker that allows communities to monitor their local organizations as well as inform CARE about actors that could be doing better; whether that is the local government or CARE itself.

Practitioners mentioned the importance of transforming norms around social inclusion. This is done by strengthening the weaker segments of society which, in turn, demonstrates to the broader community what inclusion looks like. “Once they are given a microphone, they know what to ask for” (THP practitioner interview, 2018). Discrimination related to religious, ethnic and socioeconomic minorities is evident in every community. Intentional group formation is emphasized as essential for people of any marginalized groups to have a collective voice and to create the space for that voice to be heard. The studied organizations work with those marginalized groups and empower them to understand their rights. Some organizations engage more closely with marginalized groups than others. A significant point brought up is that women are much more likely to be inclusive and care about marginalized groups than men are. The more women are represented in leadership roles, the more they engage in increasing inclusion and that influences the impact of the social cause. Gender equity and inclusive development is another expected impact noted by the practitioners.

Building social capital (trust, networks) is crucial to sustaining the impact as stressed by the practitioners. Behavior change from capacity-building activities is also expected. This change, in turn, is expected to transform social norms and more leaders of both genders to emerge during the community-led initiatives. Social accountability is another essential element under the impact phase of the analytic framework. Citizens forums bring local leaders together to review the progress and empower them to maintain their engagement, solve problems and discuss new challenges or opportunities as they emerge. In some places, public forums occur on a monthly and quarterly basis for accountability.

**Sustainability**

CLD is designed to restore citizens to have a decision on what is essential in their lives. There are numerous activities to ensure that the process is sustainable and that communities are resilient to cope with any social, economic, political and environmental shocks. It is also about building local governance and institutions that utilize democratic processes to select and train leaders. For instance, THP negotiates with the government to secure a space for farmer training and for building a structure to run integrated services (health, nutrition, WASH, library, microfinance).

Nuru works with formally recognized cooperatives that are also supported by the government. Whether with corporate partnerships or government ministries, Nuru expects activities to continue through those legally organized cooperatives. Upon Nuru’s exit, a change in power dynamics for local leaders helps them to have more control over their projects, intended goals and expected outcomes. Nuru’s impact on building social capital and improvement in skill sets contributes to increased productivity and success.

THP has a scorecard with self-reliance criteria that the community needs to pass before the organization exits. Those criteria are assessed for achievements against their intended targets on a regular basis. THP collects data on self-reliance indicators and conducts a post-exit evaluation. Once exited, THP continues to engage closely with the community for two years. Roots of Development has not yet exited from its initial target community. While maintaining its presence in a specific place, Roots ensures the continuation of the activities by building the capacity of the groups and citizens, as well as engaging closely with the local leaders and associations.

**Challenges and Solutions**

While many encouraging findings were discussed, CLD has its challenges. The practitioners indicated the lengthy process it takes to bring about a mindset shift. Women’s empowerment requires a systematic approach dependent on the context and culture of the place. Practitioners discussed barriers to women’s participation, including time constraints due to heavy workload, low level of literacy (developing countries) and cultural norms; all limiting the active involvement of women. In

some contexts, organizations choose not to actively address gender issues due to fear of cultural backlash, though the intention is there.

The practitioners stated challenges in working with volunteers; particularly, the problem of finding and identifying participants who are legitimate, well-deserving and willing to commit with minimal or no incentives. They also noted a concern that when traditionally powerful people are nominated by the communities, they may be biased to maintain the status quo and may not necessarily be honest about the work or contribute equally to the good of the community. Social mobilization and democratic processes were emphasized as some of the viable solutions to engage citizens for their own cause. The practitioners noted a need for proper power analysis (formal, informal, hidden) in terms of who controls what and who is marginalized in the community depending on the context.

## Discussion

### *Community-led Development Framework*

The methods and principles of CLD seem straightforward, but in practice, they are complex and require a proper understanding of the crucial steps. It requires readiness at all levels, including CSO leadership and staff, community members, government and other stakeholders to internalize and replicate the culture of CLD. Without explicitly elaborating on the interconnected core principles, which require a reflective and intentional process, CLD processes and practices are likely to be ineffective or have varied uptake and unforeseeable outcomes. The process by which CLD components are carried out is as equally important as the outcomes, or results (Bijoux, 2015). The below table illustrates the framework for CLD with specific elements that were identified during the interview and literature reviews.



Mindset	Capacity	Impact	Sustainability
<p>Gender analysis</p> <p>Needs-based</p> <p>Strengths-based (Skills, assets, resources)</p> <p>Community readiness</p> <p>Shared visions</p> <p>Identification of animators/volunteers</p> <p>Local staff</p> <p>Traditional leaders</p> <p>Social mobilization</p> <p>Mobilize local government</p>	<p>Capacity building /Skills</p> <p>Local governance</p> <p>Servant leadership</p> <p>Transformative leadership</p> <p>Co-creation</p> <p>Agency</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Local associations/ cooperatives</p> <p>Building partnerships</p> <p>Public accountability forums</p> <p>Empowering local leaders</p> <p>Integrated programming</p> <p>Social mobilization</p> <p>Adaptive leadership</p> <p>Collaborative relationships</p>	<p>Social capital (trust, networks)</p> <p>Social cohesion</p> <p>Relationship-building</p> <p>Participatory planning</p>	<p>Ensuring long-term funding</p> <p>Resilience</p> <p>Legal institutions or associations</p> <p>Graduation Criteria</p>

Table 2. Framework for CLD Based on Research Findings

The findings underline the importance of community-led approaches and the factors behind adopting them. Practitioners noted the ineffectiveness of traditional top-down development to alleviate poverty or address other social issues as among the reasons to approach development differently- which is bottom-up, strengths-based and led by the community. Also, the design, planning, and implementation of top-down projects often consider the *assumed* needs of the poor, rather than the *actual* need presented by a community. As a result, they try to provide quick-fix solutions that lack grounding in contextual realities. Furthermore, the initiatives fail to leverage strengths and assets from the local communities, that in turn fails to address the problem in a sustainable manner. Both literature and interview findings reinforced the emphasis to approach development on the basis of strengths and building upon them (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013a; Ball & Thornley, 2015).

The concept of CLD is a relatively new ‘place-based’ approach that tries to address complex problems in specific communities. The reason for this new place-based approach is due to its focus on an appropriate scale and to bring people together to build trust and relationships. Inspiring Communities (2013b) noted that CLD makes a more significant impact and visible differences in smaller neighborhoods, villages or on the suburban level. While the approach seems relatively better equipped to address social issues, it can be challenging in practice to determine a specific place as a community, a comment echoed by the practitioners. This challenge is due to unspecified community boundaries accompanied by a lack of infrastructure, mainly in developing countries. The practitioners noted the need to conduct a context analysis and provide specific solutions in collaboration with community members, local leaders and local government for that place.

The role of local government is the primary focus for planning and action. The role of the central government is to create an enabling environment and policy aligned with the local development initiatives for CLD (Ball & Thornley, 2015; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). This mindset shift, as indicated in literature and interviews, comes with numerous policy implications including setting enabling policy, removing bureaucratic barriers, decentralized decision-making power, and increased public resources at local levels (Ball & Thornley, 2015; Coonrod, 2015).

Findings show that setting a shared vision and building upon the existing strengths, although arguably a challenging feat, can enhance the success of community-led initiatives more than any other process in the framework (Bijoux, 2015). The research findings provide a reason to believe that a new paradigm for development thinking is evolving that views the poor as capable change agents seeking voice and agency (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). Traditionally, the hungry and poor were viewed as victims and helpless beneficiaries without viable resources to contribute to the greatest development need in their communities. CLD however, challenges this notion and revolutionizes implementers to believe in themselves as resources and leaders who can drive their own development. This mindset shift is also crucial for community members to have self-belief and confidence in their abilities to analyze the local problems, prioritize them and create a shared vision (Inspiring Communities, 2013; Ball & Thornley, 2015; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Bijoux, 2015).

The mindset of both citizens and government representatives needs to shift from seeing people living in conditions of hunger and poverty as ‘subjects’ or ‘beneficiaries’ to ‘change agents’ and rights-bearing, active citizens. The practitioners emphasized transforming mindsets and pioneering strategies that put

people in charge of their own development. Doing so, not only to do good work on the ground in partnership with people but also to serve as a demonstration for widespread adoption or policy changes that encourages everyone to have the right to take charge of their own life and destiny.

#### Gender-focused Community-led Development

The plight of women and girls globally is perhaps the most outstanding demonstration of the failed systems and social structures that require the need to approach development in intentional gender-focused and inclusive practices. The literature does not provide evidence on whether gender-focused strategies make CLD approach effective. However, since the CLD approach has many commonalities with CDD, the gender impact of the program may be discussed through the lens of CDD. In its evaluation of CDD projects, the World Bank found that initiatives which encourage women-only spaces have proven to be successful in promoting women’s agency and voice as well as in designing projects that address women’s needs (Browne, 2014). CDD programs didn’t achieve significant results and faced a challenge to influence long-term behavior changes and norms around gender roles. CDD literature presents instances of encouraging gender results as enhanced women’s engagement in gatherings and planning processes, relatively better access to services, improved skills, agency and personal empowerment (Browne, 2014).

It is evident that women and girls continue to experience discrimination and violence in every part of the world, a fact supported throughout the literature (Chow, 2003) and echoed in the practitioner interviews, let alone in the daily news. As a result, the United Nations outlined SDG 5 to ‘achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls’ (UN, 2015). This goal outlines that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but is also necessary for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Without actively working towards achieving gender equality, it’s impossible to ensure sustainable development in any society. Nevertheless, practitioners explained how the extent and type of marginalization and discrimination vary from place to place. A useful analysis will answer those strategic questions such as: what is likely to meet the least resistance from traditional authorities; which path is likely to make the biggest impact?

Gender analysis, as one practitioner explained, requires a systematic and careful step-by-step process in communities. The practitioner further elaborated that the initial process must begin with mobilizing women to enter the public space and participate in equal numbers with men in development activities. As women emerge with dynamism and passion, they receive additional leadership training. Women leaders transform the development agenda, placing greater emphasis on essential sectors (health, nutrition, WASH) than their male counterparts. Women serve as role models that transform gender norms and expectations among both males and females. They play an active role as key change agents and leaders for development.

Depending on the context, making progress in one aspect (economic, social, information, leadership or political empowerment) can help achieve progress in another. In some contexts, when women become economically powerful, it provides a more political voice and social equality. In other contexts, the inverse is true: the best pathway is by ensuring women be elected to village or district councils so that when they gain a political voice, they will have more economic opportunities. Given contextual nuances, what is the highest leverage for that specific context? What is the best pathway for progress in a given rural community? Ensuring women’s and girls’ equal access to health care, decent work, education, and representation in

political, social and economic decision-making processes will ignite economic development and benefit societies and humanity at large (UN, 2015).

### *Enablers and Barriers*

The effectiveness of CLD approach depends on enabling factors specific to a place and context. Some organizations may start the process by carefully identifying and recruiting local staff to co-create and set shared visions. Other organizations approach it by mobilizing a specific community to understand their readiness and willingness to contribute their resources, strengths, and long-term project building. Organizations may opt to work with an existing structure or community associations to strengthen their capacity and leverage their experiences without disrupting the local resources.

Literature supports that community-led initiatives mainly require the will to work together, and build trust and relationships (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). The success

also depends on the community's readiness to engage closely for shared visions and achieve them. Some argued that CLD approaches could be successful on a small scale (Inspiring Communities, 2013). Others, however, believed that the method could apply to communities of all shapes and sizes, whether urban or rural areas (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

On the other hand, the achievement of desired community outcomes can be hindered by a number of barriers. Quick-fix, short-term programs are not aligned with the principles of the approach, thus they will most likely fail to bring sustainable change. Power imbalances, lack of shared visions, lack of collaborative relationships, and ego-driven leadership (Ball & Thornley, 2015) were all elaborated on in the literature and interview findings as barriers to the effectiveness of CLD. Initiatives can also hinder success if they are focused on solving a single problem or lack local governance and active citizen engagement.

The below table illustrates details of findings on enablers and barriers to the effectiveness of community-led initiatives.

Enablers	Barriers
Poor and hungry are change agents and rights-bearing citizens	Poor and hungry are helpless beneficiaries
Having skilled local staff and leaders	Deficit-based
Shared vision, owned by the community	Lack of shared visions, not engaging communities
Collaborative relationships (multiple stakeholders)	Lack of community engagement
Active citizenry	Skill gaps and limited capacity
Enhanced social capital (Trust, networks)	Short-term approach and de-funding
Community readiness	Ego-driven leadership
Adaptable and flexible funding	Single problem-focused, instead of systems and structures
Strong local leadership and governance	Lack of democratic processes
Inclusive gender roles	Poor local leadership and governance
Strengths-based	Poor government engagement
Supportive policy environment	Lack of capacity-building
Invest strategically (long-term->5 years)	Centralized governance and insufficient public resources
Outcomes-driven	Lack of accountability mechanisms
Adaptive, servant and transformational leadership styles	Focused on specific groups of people (excluded marginalized groups)
Capacity building and civic engagement	Lack of equal participation across genders
Civil society organizations play a supporting role (not implement)	Lack of local staff and leaders
Learning and adaptation	Projects created by the government and donors without the communities' leadership
Holistic and integrated programming	Token participation
Social accountability in place	Mismatch between policy and local initiatives
Co-creation of projects	

Table 3. Enablers and Barriers of CLD

The organizations' focus to empower local communities and staff, identify, and co-create projects together signifies a valuable mindset shift for locally-led approaches. Based on the interviews, every organization practices CLD differently depending on the context and the problem that they try to address. Bijoux (2015), further asserts that though CLD has clearly defined sets of principles, it has no single starting point. It looks different from place to place, based on several enabling and limiting factors. Some organizations believe that capacity building can lead to the success of CLD whereas others utilize CLD approaches to build the capacity of the local staff, communities, and government.

The practitioners noted that building the capacity of local leaders to make meaningful choices in their own lives is what will enable them to lead their own development. The capacity-building process should be intentional and underpins all the other parts of the approach to promoting any activity or intervention on the ground. The principles and concepts of CLD are still emerging (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013), thus requiring external community development specialists (Reid & Flora, 2002) to guide citizens and communities until and after they fully internalize the practices. It is also noted that the practice sets a level playing field to exercise 'power with' the local staff and community members. Outside experts may be involved to support the locals and ensure that the people have the skillsets needed to own and drive their development. Having the right people who are skilled and capable of leading these local initiatives is a key factor in the progress and success of CLD.

The need for capable local leadership and governance is discussed extensively in the literature, organizations' methodology, and interviews. Some organizations utilize the characteristics of servant leadership; others practice the principles of transformative leadership. The research also emphasizes the importance of collaborative and adaptive leadership (Ball & Thornley, 2015; Torjman & Makhoul, 2012; Inspiring Communities, 2013a). As CLD also focuses on addressing multiple problems through a holistic systems-based approach (Ball Thornley, 2015), it is logical to note the importance of system leadership in the success of community-led initiatives.

Considering that CLD has no fixed model that works everywhere, people in a leading role are required to have a high degree of judgement and communicate well; understand design processes and that process is equally as important as results; be in a position to not do everything themselves, enable and support others to be competent and work with paradoxes (Inspiring Communities, 2012). Inspiring Communities also noted that people with all of the required skills are quite rare (2012).

The role of CSOs is highlighted not to supplement or displace government, but rather to catalyze development processes by strengthening the capacity of community-level institutions. The practitioners noted the need for organizations to acknowledge the importance of defining clear roles and playing those roles within their limits. Organizations should not undermine the crucial contribution of

communities and their role as drivers of their development. This means, their roles are only to ensure that people have proper skill sets to lead their development. The practitioners repeatedly stressed the imperative to engage in a transparent, straightforward and honest relationship with the people on the ground.

### Lessons Learned

The studied organizations utilize active learning and adaptation from fieldwork to increasingly improve their approaches to development. Through time, Nuru International learned the importance of working with the local staff, and not relying on international volunteers or short-term expat deployments to avoid dependency. Roots of Development had initially helped local communities to form community-based organizations (CBOs) that represent the local population and have the capacity to protect the population's interests. However, they learned from numerous challenges, particularly the lengthy time it requires to shift towards working with already formed associations, local leaders, and entrepreneurs.

### Brief Reflection on SD

It is widely believed that the journey to achieve sustainable development requires a new mindset and paradigm shift in development approaches. SDG 16 promotes the development of accountable, inclusive and effective institutions, which includes "ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels" (UN, 2015). Participation and representation are not only limited to those who have power; women and other marginalized groups are encouraged to have a voice and decide their own destinies. As opposed to 'top-down' approaches, the CLD model is relatively better equipped to address gender equality (SDG 5) than other traditional development approaches. The approach promotes equal involvement of women and men in their community issues. The empowerment of local-level institutions is also crucial to achieving the SDGs. If the local government is incapable of supporting community-level initiatives, it's difficult to tackle complex local problems sustainably.

The practitioners and literature indicate that 12 out of 15 SDGs require a CLD approach (Coonrod, 2016). Characteristics such as strengths-based, collaborative partnerships, enhancing social capital, and capacity-building are all considered essential principles to succeed in CLD. Reducing inequalities (SDG 10) requires a strategy that will ensure the involvement of every citizen so that no one is left behind in development. Again, the principles and practices of CLD solely rely on giving the opportunity to everyone regardless of their social class and gender so that they will have the power to shape their future as well as negotiate with outsiders.

SDG 1 to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere' includes three critical aspects of ending poverty (UN, 2015): (a) improving incomes for those who work, (b) ensuring communities are resilient to the shocks that could hurt incomes, and (c) ensuring

that safety nets are available for those who cannot. Capacity-building of farmers and community members leads to enhanced productivity, which is correlated to higher incomes (UN, 2015).

## Conclusion

There are many lessons that emerge from the practice of CLD. As the approach attempts to address intertwined and complex local problems, donors and government need to support the process of building relationships, encourage multi-sectoral collaboration and local leadership, and build on local strengths in addition to promoting learning and adaptation. The approach requires long-term engagement (> 5 years) to ensure robust development outcomes and social transformation. The role of local government and CSOs should focus on empowering local citizens and communities. Central government needs to ensure the enabling policy environment is aligned with the community-level initiatives.

CLD remains an emerging development approach that requires further research to better understand the enablers and barriers specific to developing countries and further practice to include all of the CLD phases in a given intervention site beyond the current priority of organizations in the capacity building phase. Implementing all four phases and CLD principles requires long-term engagement, adaptable funding, expertise and an enabling policy environment. This is notably a massive undertaking and it is likely that organizations are in the initial phase of practice. Just as sustainable development is often slow and incremental, understanding of CLD will increase over time and particularly as donors show more flexibility in funding mechanisms to allow proper CLD, the approach will have a profound impact in addressing social problems and achieving the SDGs.

## Annexes

### CLD interview questions

1. Tell me about your organizations' community-led development methodology and why is this approach important? What are the driving forces for doing specific programs/specific approaches for development? Define community.
2. In your opinion, what factors or characteristics or processes or principles are associated with successful community-level initiatives? And what factors can hinder the effectiveness of CLD initiatives?

### Mindset (community mobilization)

3. Who are the **poor** and how do you ensure the involvement, empowerment and contribution of the poor in their own development?
4. What are your practical approaches to ensure the involvement, empowerment, and contribution of **women** to development? Challenges?
5. How do you bring communities, individuals and families together to identify and stand for a vision of what they want to achieve?
6. How do you determine local strengths, assets and resources that could assist with the implementation of your projects/programs? Specific examples.

### Capacity

7. How do you engage the local government in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of your programs?
8. How do you ensure the leadership and active participation of the local communities in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of CLD programs? Along with this, if you can talk about mobilizing voluntary efforts of the citizens to achieve priorities within the vision?
9. How do you encourage and influence individuals at the community level to form a group for collective action and advocacy?

### Impact

14. What are your practical approaches to ensure participatory planning?
15. How do you facilitate public forums or other similar stages for the local government to demonstrate transparency and accountability so that citizens can review progress on goals?
16. How are marginalized groups accessing and using information and communication technologies to produce and use data in ways that strengthen their empowerment?
17. How do you think your approach will result in a long-term impact, sustainability and self-reliance? What impact do you expect?
18. How do you ensure the continuation and sustainability of the achievement of your programs after graduation?

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